

Remarks by the Honorable Sean O'Keefe
NASA Administrator
Women in Aerospace Awards
Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C.
September 16, 2003

Thank you Linda (Linda Billings, President Women in Aerospace) for that gracious introduction and good evening ladies and gentlemen.

I'm delighted to join you tonight to help celebrate this special night of achievement.

Within the NASA family, we certainly take special pride in our legacy of women space pioneers. Twenty years ago, to the joy of our Nation, Dr. Sally Ride became America's first woman in space, on the STS-107 mission.

Since then, we've celebrated the increasing leadership role that women are playing throughout the Agency and in the larger aerospace community, a leadership role that is well on display tonight.

Fittingly, once a year, Women in Aerospace takes the opportunity to pay tribute to several dedicated individuals who are making extraordinary contributions to our Nation's aeronautics and space programs.

I wish to provide my hearty congratulations to this year's recipients, NASA's own Educator Astronaut Barbara Morgan and to Dr. Andrea Donnelley of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, as well as to Blair Marks, Marcia Smith and Captain Melanie Bean. You all make us proud.

Tonight, it is my high honor to help present Women in Aerospace's first ever Aerospace Awareness Award to Dr. Marla Pérez-Davis of NASA's Glenn Research Center, recognizing in particular Marla's outstanding work on public education and outreach.

As you all know, NASA expresses what we hope to achieve on behalf of the American people through our mission goals. The NASA mission compels us to

understand and protect our home planet, explore the Universe, search for life and inspire the next generation of explorers.

Through her professional work and her generous volunteer efforts, Marla embodies what our mission is all about, and definitely is serving as a fantastic role model for our next generation of explorers. Indeed, I think the following information about her will blow you away.

Dr. Pérez-Davis has been with NASA Glenn since 1983, the year of Sally Ride's flight. She is a member of a still small but growing community of women chemical engineers, holding a Ph.D. in the discipline from Case Western University.

Case Western, incidentally, is the institution that gave NASA's our first Administrator, T. Keith Glennan. So Marla, keep at it, and you may be the second.

Our honoree currently serves NASA as the chief of the electrochemistry branch, in the power and on-board propulsion technology division at the Glenn Research Center. As chief, she leads a team of researchers pushing cutting edge-research and development of advanced fuel cells and batteries for aerospace applications. She's also taken a leadership role in our work on microelectrochemical systems and nanotechnologies for aerospace power system applications.

Dr. Pérez-Davis took an unusual route to the shores of Lake Erie, coming to Ohio and NASA from Puerto Rico where she dreamed of joining this Agency because of "its innovative spirit and vision to explore new frontiers."

Most importantly, she has returned to native land on several occasions to help recruit new talent to NASA, especially at her alma mater, the University of Puerto Rico, where she earned a bachelors degree.

As a participant in the NASA Administrator's Fellowship Program, she initiated a major personnel exchange program between the University of Puerto Rico and NASA. She has also started a workshop series for K-12 teachers, to help these educators engage the youth of Puerto Rico in exciting lessons of science and discovery.

You would think that this would be enough of a contribution to justify this award, but there's much more. Recently, Dr. Pérez-Davis completed a special assignment with our Educator Astronaut Program at NASA Headquarters, helping to recruit our new class of Educator Astronauts. And on her own time Marla's a frequent judge at science fairs,

and a regular participant in careers fairs. She's especially active in mentoring through groups dedicated to promoting careers in science and engineering to Latino youth.

It is fitting that this award is given to Dr. Pérez-Davis during Hispanic Heritage Month. During last year's Hispanic Heritage Month commemoration educational pioneer Jaime Escalante (High-Me Es-Ca-Lan-Tay) spoke at NASA headquarters and talked about the desperate need for role models to help instill in our youth el deseo de triunfar (El De-Say-O De Tree-Un-Far)-- the desire to triumph. Dr. Marla Pérez-Davis is a role model who we can all take great pride in.

It is now my great pleasure to ask Marla to come forward to receive this well deserved award.